



LOCAL REPORT

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Cleanup angers firm's owner

PCB focus on woman's home draws outrage

By SARAH GREENBLATT
STAFF WRITER

As workers used special equipment to remove polychlorinated biphenyls from a South Plainfield home on Friday, the owner of a business located in an adjacent Superfund site quietly seethed.

SOUTH PLAINFIELD

Margaret Reidy's Spicer Avenue home is one of seven houses undergoing cleanup by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which is investigating the scope of PCB contamination on and off the adjacent

Hamilton Industrial Park.

While the industrial park has been targeted for Superfund cleanup, PCBs found last year in some of the businesses operating inside the industrial park remain there. And business owner A.J. DiLello is growing frustrated.

"I want it cleaned up," said DiLello, owner of Robalo Enterprises. "There are a lot more people working here than living in those houses."

DiLello said 15 of his 25 employees left after the EPA informed him of potential long-term health hazards posed by PCBs inside his warehouse and distribution

business.

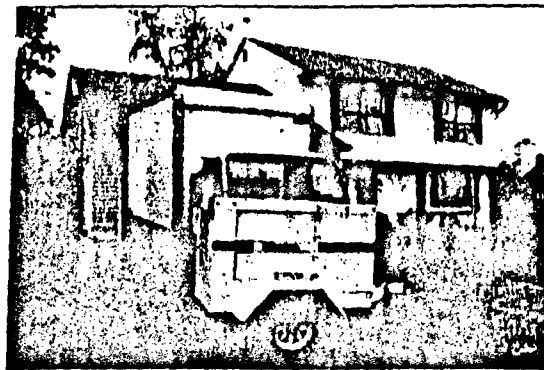
"There are people who are real loyal, but you can tell they don't want to be here," DiLello added.

Robalo was one of seven businesses in which PCB levels on floors and surfaces were found to exceed federal standards of 10 micrograms per 100 square centimeters.

Fifteen businesses operate on the 25-acre site, formerly operated by Cornell-Dubilier Electronics and now owned by D.S.C. of Newark Enterprises.

Officials have said while PCB readings

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DICK COSTELLO/Staff photographer

● Equipment is used to clean PCBs from Margaret Reidy's home, which is adjacent to the Hamilton Industrial Park Superfund site.

Gentlemen, swap your engines

8 youths arrested on Looze

PCB: Cleanup angers company's owner

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in the businesses were as high as 680 micrograms, they do not pose an immediate health threat. PCBs damage the liver and immune system and are suspected of causing cancer.

Rep. Bob Franks, R-7th Dist., said on Friday he is dissatisfied with the lack of progress in cleaning the businesses and he will press for stronger Superfund legislation to allow speedier action.

In a recent meeting with the EPA, Franks said, agency officials told him PCB levels inside the businesses are not high enough for them to order the site's past or present owners to conduct a cleanup.

Only if the contaminant levels were higher, or if they were migrating from the site, could the EPA order an immediate cleanup, Franks said.

"The EPA should be able to order a cleanup," the congressman said.

EPA site coordinator Eric Wilson said he could not comment on Franks' statements, since the matter is now under negotiation between the agency and parties responsible for the contamination.

"We're actively negotiating with them to clean up the interiors," Wilson said.

The agency last year ordered

D.S.C. to fence off the property and to pave a heavily contaminated dirt roadway that was generating tainted dust around the site.

Acknowledging contamination was discovered inside the businesses last year, Wilson said the agency has responded more quickly to PCBs in the homes, in part, because children are involved and exposure in residences is greater than at the workplace.

The agency will soon test more area homes to determine the scope of residential contamination, Wilson said.

Meanwhile, Assemblyman Bob Smith, D-Middlesex, pledged to push the state Department of Environmental Protection to improve its record in responding to contamination hazards.

Noting the DEP has known of elevated PCB levels at the site for more than 10 years, Smith said steps should have been taken to protect residents much sooner.

A 1986 DEP study of the site revealed high levels of PCBs in soils and in sediments taken from the Bound Brook, which traverses the property.

"In a situation where there is an immediate health threat, you'd think they would be more responsive," Smith said.

DEP officials have said contamination found at the site was not as

serious as the hazards posed by other polluted properties in New Jersey.

Edison Wetlands Association Executive Director Robert Spiegel countered that the proximity of the homes to the site, and the presence of a heavily used bicycle and pedestrian path across the property, should have triggered a swift response from the agency.

Smith said his April 3 letter seeking proposals for improved procedures has not yet received a response from DEP Commissioner Robert Shinn.

DEP spokeswoman Loretta O'Donnell said she could not comment on Smith's request until Shinn has responded in writing.

With the EPA cleanup of her home under way, Reidy said last week that she feels trapped in her home.

"I've been told the real-estate value has dropped about \$40,000," Reidy said, adding that she hopes the planned cleanup of the industrial park will change that. "Only time will tell."

Reidy said she appreciates the work that is being done on her home.

"The EPA is doing all they can to help me," she said, adding that the agency also has promised to excavate PCB-laden soil from her yard. "They're moving on it."

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